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ROSS DOWSON WEBSITE EDITOR COMMENT:
Readers are referred to a subsequent April 1973 (DB 49) document by Linda Blackwood, "Women's Liberation, a counter-resolution," as well as an earlier December 1972 document "Toronto Women's Caucus: A Two-Year Experience in a Cross-City Women's Liberation Group" by three LSA activists (DB 23, text in W10).

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WOMEN'S LIBERATION REPORT

by Jacquie Henderson on behalf of the Political Committee Adopted by the January 19, 1973 Plenum of the LSA/LSO Central Committee

This report has four aims: 1. to explain our basic approach to the women's liberation movement as developed over the last several years and as outlined in our convention and plenum documents; 2. to explain the purpose of the 1972-73 women's liberation resolution, the weaknesses of the original draft, and why it had to be amended; 3. to outline the amendments and their purpose; and 4. to outline the main tasks before us in our women's liberation work at this time.

Our Approach

It is valuable to trace the development of our thinking and our intervention in the women's liberation movement through our documents. Our 1970 convention resolution, our 1971 Central Committee plenum report, and the resolution now before the movement represent three important milestones in the process whereby we have assessed our experiences and drawn conclusions on how we can intervene most precisely and effectively with our program.

Our intervention in the women's liberation movement — as in all movements -- has been very much a learning experience. As we have deepened our involvement in the feminist movement, so have we deepened our understanding of how to apply our program. And we are still learning, constantly developing our understanding.

We don't have a rigid blueprint of how the feminist movement will develop. What we do have is an analysis of' women's oppression, and a strategy for women's liberation, which provide us with some clear guidelines which direct our intervention.

Our 1970 document, our first women's liberation resolution, outlined this analysis and strategy. It laid out the general concepts which have guided our intervention since. It is useful to go over this document briefly so that the framework of our approach is clear.

The 1970 document analysed how the roots of feminism lie in fundamental contradictions of class society. It states that the struggle for women's liberation has an anti-capitalist dynamic. By this we mean that the goals of the feminist movement — freeing women from the subjugated position they have held throughout the history of class society — cannot be achieved without the destruction of the capitalist order. The document described the

new feminist movement, emerging now in a time of deepening radicalization, and saw that it would be a central component of the Canadian revolution.

We took note of the contradiction between the very broad ferment that exists around the issues raised by the women's liberation movement and the still tiny organized movement. We saw that in our intervention a key task was to project a strategy through which this ferment could be channelled, into a powerful movement for women's liberation.

We put forward a mass action strategy for the feminist movement. It will best be built, we said, by constantly reaching out to women through demands that answer their needs, and by drawing them into struggle, independent of, and against the ruling class — into struggle against the ruling class institutions which maintain and defend the oppression of women. This is why we call it an anti-capitalist rmovement. The achievement of its goals demands a struggle against the capitalist ruling class, and, ultimately, demands its overthrow.

In the process of this struggle, women will develop cononfidence in themselves, in their ability to win victories. They will gain political understanding of the forces they are up agalnst and of the type of struggle necessary to overcome them. Increasing numbers will recognize in the program of Marxism and in a revolutionary Marxist party the instrument required for victory in the struggle for women's liberation.

In the 1970 document, we set ourselves the task of working within the existing women's liberation groups, and of looking for openings to project action that would pose our strategy concretely. We also took note of the importance of the abortion campaign which, even at that time had already shown itself as a central mobilizing struggle for the movement.

In the year following our 1970 convention, we went through a number of experiences in the women's liberation movement which enabled us to further define our intervention. In that year, the feminist movement in Canada experienced a big debate over mass action, centering around the question of whether or not to continue the abortion campaign that had been launched so effectively by the 1970 Abortion Caravan. Many women's liberation groups split on this question.

We were in the center of this debate, arguing for a mass action perspective and proposing concrete actions such as the February 18, 1971 day of protest against the abortion laws. These experiences, gave us a much clearer concept of how we could intervene with our program to build this movement and win women to our ideas.

The Summer 1971 Central Committee plenum analysed these experiences and outlined the major tasks before us.

The Women's Liberation Report to that plenum said: "In our view the primary task before the women's liberation movement at this time is to take the initiative in drawing together all the forces who call for repeal of the abortion laws into a massive organized and united campaign."

That report outlined why abortion had emerged as a focal issue, the significanece of the abortion campaign to the building of the feminist movement, the reasons why repeal was the correct slogan around which to build the campaign and the necessity of building action coalitions around this demand. The report geared the movement for considerable intervention in the abortion campaign.

We have continued to learn through our intervention in this area sinece 1971. We now have an even clearer picture of the role the abortion campaign can play in advancing the women's liberalion struggle.

The l972~73 Resolution

The resolution now before the movement was originally drafted in May-June, 1972 -- over six months ago and was printed in July, 1972. It was the product of the rich experience in this area up to that time and was built on the previous resolution and plenum reports.

The purpose of' this resolution (both the onginal and amended versions; was to document the experiences we had been through and the conclusions we drew from them. In it we aimed to outline the fundamental concepts on which our analyses and strategy is based, clarify the central role of the abortion campaign at this time in projecting a mass action strategy to the feminist movement, and outline the tasks before us.

The document can be divided into eight main-points:

1 . It examines the features of the developing feminist radicalization and sought to situate it within the framework of the deepening radicalization as a whole.

2. It examined the roots of women's oppression, demonstrating how the oppression of women is rooted in class society and putting forward the Marxist analysis of the family.

3. It outlined a revolutionary strategy for women's liberation based on mass action around transitional and democratic demands.

4. It explained the role of action coalitions around single issues in uniting women in struggle.

5. It outlined why the abortion issue has emerged as the central mobilizing issue before the women's liberation movement at this time and summarized our experiences in this struggle.

6. It linked our participation in the abortion campaign with our intervention in other areas of feminist organization

such as the NDP, the campus, etc.

7. It analyzed our opponents and their opposition to mass action.

8. It laid out the main tasks before us at this time:

   a) participation in all the many aspects of the developing feminist movement,

   b) participation in the abortion campaign as a concrete application of our mass action strategy,

   c) socialist propaganda through our educational classes, forums, election campaigns, circulation of our papers, etc.,

   d) recruitment of radicalizing women to the LSA/LSO.

Problems with the Original Draft Resolution

After the original draft of the resolution was circulated and the discussion on it opened up, we found that it had many problems. The report on this resolution adopted at the September Central Committee plenum outlined these problems, and proposed the corrections required in our line.

The resolution had not answered a number of important questions which arose from our experiences in the abortion campaign. It was not adequate to arm us to build the abortion campaign and the women's liberation movement as a whole. In several places it contained significant errors,

The original July draft had reflected a disorientation that started to take place in our work last spring. We were beginning to drift away from viewing the abortion campaign as an application of our transitional strategy to the feminist . movement, and as an integral and important part of the feminist movement.

Thus the original July draft didn't present an accurate picture of the abortion campaign and answer the questions of why the actions are not larger, why the coalitions are not broader. In fact it exaggerated the size of the repeal movement and presented an erroneous view of the possibilities immediately before us, implying that a mass movement for repeal was just around the corner, if not already in existence.

It also didn't answer the question of the relationship of the abortion campaign to the rest of the feminist movement. In some places the document tended to put forward a schematic view of the future development of the feminist movement — that it must necessarily start off with a mass struggle around abortion, and that after this struggle was won, struggles around other demands would come to the fore, etc.; that a mass feminist movement would necessarily emerge through the abortion struggle.

It wasn't clear from the document what the character of the abortion campaign was -- whether it was a feminist campaign or something separate from the feminist movement. It didn't clarify the relationship of the abortion campaign to other developments in the feminist movement. It didn't come to grips with the isolation comrades felt from many of these developments.

Further, the document's motivation for the abortion campaign was unbalanced and weak because it motivated the importance of this campaign almost entirely in terms of the abstract importance of the issue over other issues, rather than in terms of the role the **struggle** for the right to abortion can play in the development of the feminist movement.

These distortions cut across the main line of the resolution which was to project a mass action strategy for the feminist movement.

The Amendments

The amendments to the resolution, flowing out of our discussion at the Central Committee plenum last September, brought the campaign back down to earth by placing it within the context of the developing feminist movement.

Some comrades have raised the concern that they think the amendments represent a dumping or pulling back from building the abortion campaign. They are wrong. The amended document as a whole presents a much clearer, more rounded and more correct view of the abortion campaign. This correction has already enabled us to be much more effective in building the abortion campaign, as I will show later in this report.

The amended document must be taken as a whole. But it is important at this point to deal with the amendments themselves — not because discussion should center on particular phrases in the document or because the amendments can be considered separately from the whole of the document but because the amendments have been a source of controversy within the leadership since the last plenum.

Comrades will recall that at the last plenum we discussed a number of problems that existed in our women's liberation work. The plenum unanimously adopted the women's liberation report which incorporated certain corrections our line and instructed the Political Committee to amend the document to encompass these if that proved on examination to be necessary. But when the Political Committee got down to work to bring the resolution into line with the plenum decisions, differences developed over the proposed amendments.

Some comrades on the Political Committee voted against the amendments and, after they were adopted voted against the motion to adopt the general line of the resolution as amended. There has not yet been any documentation of this position. But today we have a report by

Linda Blackwood putting forward this point of view. In view of this controversy, want to make sure it is quite clear what the amendments to tne resolution aim to accomplish.

When we examine(d) the resolution we found that its weaknesses were reflected in three main ways:

1. It lacked an explanation of the importance of the abortion canpaign in posing a mass action, struggle perspective for the feminist movement;
2. It lacked a section analyzing the present stage of the abortion campaign; and
3. It made some statements which tended to pose the schematic view mentioned earlier.

We amended the document in four places to correct this.

Amendment #1

The first place the document is amended is on page 5 (see Appendix, Amendment #1). We felt that this change -- changing the word "the" to "a" -- was necessary because the original wording implied that lack of control of her body is the **only** force driving women into marriage. .

Amendment #2

What gives the abortion campaign its key role in the feminist movement today? This is the question which the second amendment deals with (see Appendix, Amendment #2).

The original draft tried to explain the role of the abortion campaign exclusively in terms of the importance of the right to abortion for women, in general. The amendment discusses the specific importance of the abortion struggle today to revolutionists as part of our mass action strategy for the feminist movement.

The abortion campaign gives us an important opportunity to pose our mass action strategy in a concrete situation and win women to it. We know that we can't convince women of the correctness of our strategy simply by propaganda in the abstract. We have to intervene in the life of the feminist movement and to demonstrate what our strategy means in practice. The abortion campaign provides us with an excellent opportunity to do this. This campaign sharply counterposes the independent struggle of women around concrete demands to the dead-end strategies of the liberals, reformists, and ultralefts.

Why has the abortion struggle come to the fore in this way? The original draft suggested that this was because of the inherent importance of the issue. In our view the importance of the abortion struggle is not that it is the "most revolutionary women's issue",

somehow "more radical" than struggles for equal pay or daycare, etc. Rather it has come to the fore for quite specific reasons, which are explained in the document:

— lack of control of her body is a fundamental aspect of women's oppression.

— the contradiction is sharply posed between the technological possibilities for women having this control and the man-made laws which deny them this control.

-- abortion is, except under restricted conditions, illegal. The problem is not posed as simply the abuse of existing laws (as in the case of equal pay, for example). The problem is the existence of laws which flatly deny women their rights and which must be eliminated.

-- the enemy is cleary defined: the federal government. The abortion struggle is not merely against individual agencies of women's oppression, such as an employer, a university etc., but against the federal government: the executive committee of the class that oppresses women. This makes a united cross-country campaign logical and necessary.

— abortion is a big issue in the political life of this country today. The right wing has chosen this issue as a key point of attack on women's struggle for their rights.

— mass support has developed for repeal of the abortion laws.

The amended resolution thus explains the many special factors involved in the abortion issue that have led to this struggle becoming the most prominent one in the new feminist radicalization.

Amendment #3

The third amendment is on page 15-16 (see Appendix, Amendment #3

A section called **The Abortion Campaign** takes up the questions posed in our work of building that campaign. Here, added to the two original paragraphs on the formation of the Canadian Women's coalition and the Front Commun and their significance, are four points:

1. Why the Coalitions Are Still Relatively Narrow

The abortion issue continues to be sharply posed in Canadian politics. The Canadian Women's Coalition to Repeal the Abortion Laws (along with the Front Commun in Quebec.) is now firmly established as the only cross-country

organization in the feminist movement posing united action around any aspect of women's oppression at this time.

The coalition has progressed quite a bit since the founding of the provincial coalitions slightly over a year ago but (as we noted at the time of the September plenum); they were not yet in any way "mass" organizations, but in fact remain relatively narrow in the forces they include.

The size of the actions of the abortion campaign flow directly out of the objective problems facing the feminist movement right now:

a. The newness of the feminist movement and the lack of tradlitions of struggle. Not since the suffrage movement have women organized right across the country to win a basic right from the government. And even this precedent is hidden from most women. Also the whole socialization process conditions women against actively fighting for their needs.

b. The lack of understanding of the need to **struggle** for liberation. As the women's liberation movement has developed a certain polarization has taken place. Many contending viewpoints and strategies vie for women's allegiance. Most of these strategies do not pose **united struggle** as the means to win liberation, but instead put forward perspectives of personal liberation, of changing consciousness through discussions and counter-institutionalism rather than of changing the system from within the established institutions by lobbying, etc.

Many radicalizing women have been disoriented to some degree by these wrong perspectives — even women who are convinced of the importance of the abortion issue are not necessarily convinced of the need to **struggle** for the right to abortion.

This affects both the size of the abortion campaign and the nature of our work. We want to intervene in the many aspects of the feminist movement, posing our analysis and strategy and making links with the abortion campaign. Both the abortion campaign and our overall work suffer if we are isolated from these developments. We have to educate radicalizing women on the importance of the struggle against the government's abortion laws.

2. The Feminist Character of the Campaign and Our Slogans

The document says that "the abortion campaign is a feminist campaign because it organizes women independently in struggle against their oppression. At the same time the abortion coalitions don't demand that women be conscious feminists before they become involved in the campaign. They unite all those women who agree with the demand of repeal of the abortion laws..."

The slogans we project for the abortion campaign flow out of our view of it as a women's rights campaign. I would like to discuss the question of slogans now in a bit broader context than in some of the previous discussions where the question of slogans has almost become a diversion from other more general questions about the nature of our work. Here I want to take up the connection between the feminist character of the campaign and its slogans and demands. This can throw light on how we see the campaign and enable us to clarify how we intervene as Trotskyists.

Since the questions of slogans has been viewed as a central one by those who oppose the amendments, I'll go into this question in some detail.

The purpose of a slogan is to popularize the key demands of a struggle. We formulate slogans in order to put forward, as clearly and concisely as possible, the main political content which we want to inject into the struggle. An effective slogan has to clearly outline the goal of the struggle, to be clear and unambiguous. It has to make our demands, our program, understandable to the greatest number of people.

Our support of the abortion law repeal campaign is based on the clear feminist character which this campaign has taken on in the last few years: it has become a struggle of women for their rights. Some supporters of the campaign base their support on other considerations, such as population control or rationalization of the legal system. We can coexist with such supporters as long as the goal of the campaign -- repeal -- remains the agreed-upon basis of cooperation. But the slogans that **we as Trotskyists** inject into the campaign are ones which clearly pose and intensify the feminist character of the campaign: that is, slogans which pose a perspective of women struggling for their rights.

In our 1971 plenum report we had this to say on the question of slogans:

"We think that the two basic slogans for the campaign should be 'repeal of the abortion laws' and 'abortion: a woman's right to choose'." In discussing the question of 'no forced sterilization' with comrades across the country, it is our feeling that this isn't a big issue before us at this time. Areas can work out for themselves whether it is necessary to add this demand to differentiate us from the population control forces. In general we feel the theme 'abortion: a woman's right to choose' covers this angle

adequately."

But in the spring of 1972 we started to use a different slogan: "Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child", as a main slogan of the campaign -- sometimes together with "Abortion: A Woman's Right to Choose"; sometimes replacing it as the main slogan. You'll probably remember how we featured the "every mother" slogan together with the "right to choose" slogan on the poster we put out to build the founding conference of the Canadian Women's Coalition in Winnipeg last spring. On the poster for the May 6 coalition actions, the "every mother" slogan was the only slogan included to explain the demand to repeal the abortion laws. And it was the one slogan we chose for the button we put out then, with the image of a mother and child.

We have gone through an experience with this slogan and we are in a position to evaluate it. The amended resolution projects that we will not put this slogan forward in the abortion movement. It returns to the correct position of the 1971 plenum which projected our main slogan, in elaborating the central demand of "repeal all abortion laws now", to be the slogan "abortion: a woman's right to choose".

"Abortion: a woman's right to choose" explains repeal of the abortion laws in the most popular way, as a simple democratic right and clearly the right of all women. It states clearly that the abortion issue centers on whether or not women will continue to be deprived of this right. This slogan directs its appeal to all layers of women -- it says that every woman should have the right to choose when and if to bear a child.

Since feminists are fighting for the right to choose over all aspects of their lives, this slogan also expresses succinctly how the abortion struggle links up with the broad struggle for the liberation of women.

But the slogan "every mother a willing mother, every child a, wanted child" is much less clear. It does not pose abortion clearly as a woman's right. It doesn't explain that abortion should be taken out of the Criminal Code so that women can choose -- it doesn't even necessarily refer to abortion.

In posing the question of wanted children, this slogan gets us into a diversion from the fundamental issue of women's rights. This can leave the impression that we see abortion as a means of population control, a means of

ensuring that children will be wanted and happier.

Will children be happier if the right to abortion is gained? I would think so, to some extent. But it's a complex question. Winning the right to abortion won't alter the prison-like limitations of the family under capitalism. As revolutionaries we support the rights of children and have a lot to say about the oppression of children. But raising this question is not the best way to achieve clarity in the debate over abortion, an issue which centers on the rights of women.

The abortion campaign, like the feminist movement, has been slandered by the capitalist press, "right to life", the prime minister, etc., as being anti-mother and anti-child. The real fear of those who slander the feminist movement is that it is pro-women. The feminist movement has had to counter these slanders and pressures. It has done this by rejecting them, not by giving in to them.

We reject the concept of the right-wing, anti-abortion forces, that women's right to abortion is in any way against mothers and children. What the abortion campaign opposes is the **compulsory** nature of the motherhood role in this society.

It has been argued that the "every mother" slogan enables us to reach the largest number of women: those who think of themselves as mothers and future mothers.

There are no magic formulas that will unlock the door to a mass movement. Such a movement must be built through patient, consistent work, by intervening in the ongoing development of the feminist radicalization and by taking advantage of the real opportunities that present themselves to mobilize women in struggle.

The "every mother" slogan poses the question strictly within the mother-child relationship — within the traditional role allotted to women by class society: that of childbearers and childrearers, It accepts the present level of consciousness of the majority of women and does not seek to raise it. That is not a strength of the slogan — that is its big weakness.

Whether or not the acceptance of backward consciousness will help us to mobilise more women is highly questionable. It certainly excludes the growing number of women who are beginning to think beyond the traditional concept that motherhood is every woman destiny and are beginning to demand their right to choose over their lives.

Even if this slogan were to somehow mobilize more women

it would not serve the purpose we see the abortion campaign serving. Our program — the demands and slogans we advocate — have the purpose of raising consciousness.

We often say that people learn through struggle. That's true. But that is only half the truth. The other half of our transitional strategy, the first half on which this struggle is based, is the **program.** The principled democratic and transitional demands and slogans clearly define the problem, its source, and pose what is needed for its solution, They pose the way forward. That is what "repeal the abortion laws" and "abortion: a woman's right to choose" do.

3. Where Will the Campaign Best Be Built?

The document points out the uneveness of the radicalization and the need to pay particular attention to trying to draw into the campaign women from those layers where the radicalization is deepest. It points to the campuses and high schools along with the NDP as areas where the feminist ferment is deepest and thus these are priority areas for building the abortion campaign. At the same time it points out that the campaign is not exclusionist and we, unlike the sectarians, don't write off any group of women as being beyond the reach of the campaign.

4. How We Participate in Other Formations of the Feminist Movement

There is one small but significant change in this section. The original draft implied that when we work in formations of the feminist movement other than the abortion campaign the **only** thing we do is talk about socialism and raise the abortion issue. The amended resolution indicates that we look for opportunities to pose action in every group we participate in, whether it be a struggle to win accreditation for a women's studies course, or for a Ministry of Women's Rights to be set up by an NDP provincial government, or the rights of women to organize day care centers in North York.

At the same time we want to make direct links with these organizations and the abortion campaign and get them to participate in the struggle for repeal.

It is only with this more rounded and flexible orientation, constantly looking for openings, that we will be able to intervene effectively in the various developments and recruit feminists to our movement.

Amendment #4

The last amendment is on page 25 (see Appendix, Amendment #4) and makes a correction similar to the ones already discussed. It is a reworking of the response to the

attack "abortion law repeal is important but we shouldn't devote so much time to it" to explain the priority of the abortion campaign in terms of the **struggle** not just in terms of the **issue**, as it was originally motivated.

To summarize the amendments: They explain why there are good opportunities to build the abortion campaign now but that there are no short cuts to building it. They examine the real situation before us and pose concretely how to build the abortion campaign at this time, and how the abortion campaign fits into our other work in the feminist movement. Because they do this they strengthen and further clarify the main line of the original document.

Even with the amendments, the document is incomplete. Every resolution is incomplete, in a sense, because all it can do is sum up the thinking of the leadership at the time when it was drafted. Events march on, we have further experiences, and our thinking continues to develop. The amended resolution reflects where we were in our collective thinking at the September plenum, seven months before the new date of our convention. Looking at it today, we can now see a number of places where further additions are in order. But the basic line of the amended resolution is clear and sound.

The next part of this report will talk about some of the important experiences and lessons of the last four months which we must incorporate into the line which we will present at the convention -- a line which consists of the resolution plus its extensions in this report.

Our Work Over the Fall

We have been making adjustments in our work over the fall based on the corrections incorporated in the amendments. It has been an uneven process; in some areas the application of the amendments has been more full than in others. But I think we can say that the correction to our work reflected in the amended document has already shown itself to be very important in life.

There are two main aspects to these adjustments:

1) Getting right into the feminist movement; beginning to break from our somewhat isolated position in the feminist movement which was a result of our unbalanced view of the abortion campaign.

2) Becoming increasingly effective in putting forward our strategy and winning women to our concept of how to struggle.

I would like to deal with three aspects of our work over the fall: a) our work in the NDP; b) our intervention in the women's studies courses; and c) our work in building tlie abortion campaign. The first two represent relatively new areas of women^s liberation work for us and are part of a more general process of becoming involved in

all the developments in the feminist movement which provide openings for intervention. There were other developments we were involved in over the fall, notably a continuing struggle in North York for day care, but I would like to spend some time on the NDP and women's studies now since they were cross-country experiences.

a) NDP

As the document outlines, the NDP is an important area for our intervention with our mass action strategy for the feminist movement. The existence of the NDP has had big impact on the whole development of the feminist movement in Canada; The NDP has been associated with women's rights since the first cross-country action of the feminist movement in 1970 — the abortion caravan — when the NDP directly aided the demonstrators in the House of Commons and Grace Mclnnis addressed the rally.

As the document points out, "Feminists and left wingers have succeeded in getting the party to adopt a number of planks in a women's rights program". The document also takes up the big debate over political action that exists in the feminist movement

Our strategy for our feminist intervention in the NDP centers on demanding the party become a fighting agent for women's rights. This strategy is not only important in the development of the feminist movement; but also for the broader class struggle as the document points out.

"This fight brings women in direct conflict with the reformist leadership of the party and trade union hierarchy and the reformist illusions of the class as a whole. The feminist struggle will play an important role in breaking the Canadian working class from reformism."

The document puts forward the orientation of building the feminist movement both inside and outside the NDP, and takes up the question posed by some Wafflers at the time the document was written of whether or not to organize women in general in the party or rather to just organize left or "socialist" women. It related our experience to that date: "Many of the forces that will make the NDP act' for women will come from those women currently within the party. Women in the NDP, as elsewhere, learn about the nature of the system and the futility of reformism largely through struggling against their own oppression for their own needs.

It is quite possible, and even probable, that many ol the traditionally conservative women's groups in the party will take on a feminist character. An example of this already exists: At the last convention of the B.C. NDP, the women's committee, which had been largely devoted to serving coffee at NDP functions, changed its name and its function to a Women's Rights Committee. It has formulated policy on women's rights, supported the abortion coalitions, and even held an all-women's conference to which it invited representatives of the feminist

movement. This shows the possibilities for organizing women in the NDP. It would be sectarian to demand, as some women in the Waffle do, that NDP women must first develop a full feminist or socialist consciousness before they are drawn into struggle around their rights."

Over the fall period, with the opportunities posed by the federal election and the British Columbia and Ontario conventions, we had some important experiences in our NDP women's liberation work which sustain the conclusions put forward in the document. We intervened in special women's meetings organized during the election, including those called by the Women for Political Action to put forward our view of the feminist struggle and the necessity for it to link feminists to support the labor party. We also intervened in the election through our participation in the actions of the Canadian Women's Coalition to Repeal the Abortion Laws which succeeded in getting Lewis and NDP candidates to speak out en abortion during the election, Later in the fall we took advantage of another opportunity to put forward our view of correct political action for

women when we appealed for feminists to participate in our Toronto and Ottawa election campaigns.

In projecting our line in the Ontario Left Caucus in preparation for the fall convention, we came up against the opposition of those who like the earlier Wafflers, objected to aiming to organize women as women in the NDP to make it a vehicle for women's liberation. We argued that the task was not simply to organize "socialist women" as a "women's auxiliary" of the Left Caucus, but instead to attempt to move women throughout the party into feminist action. With this orientation we participated in the broad women's caucus at the convention. We advocated that the Women's Policy Committee of the party be given powers to act and be opened up to give women a vehicle to carry on their organizing on a day-to-day basis after the convention.

Our intervention at the B.C. NDP convention centered around the big battle for the Ministry of Women's Rights in the new NDP provincial government. This fight was led by the Women's Rights Committee, in which we have been active since it was formed at the last convention. The Committee held large meetings open to all women at the convention to organize its intervention. At the end of the convention it held a meeting to plan the ongoing struggle to get the government to set up the women's ministry and adopted at the convention and to concretize what such a ministry would do. It projected regional conferences to take place early in the new year, followed by a provincial conference. *(By the time this document was presented to the LSA convention, ultra-left forces had pressured the movement to instead reject acceptance of, or participation in the B.C. NDP's Ministry of Women's Rights-- Web Ed.)*

This fight provides an opportunity for ongoing feminist struggle in the party in B.C. We will have to give further

thought to finding avenues to make our women's liberation work in the NDP an ongoing intervention, not just something we do around conventions. However, that fact that there is a federal convention coming up this summer may open possibilities for our NDP work across the country over the coming months. Of course, intervening in the NDP on the abortion issue also provides openings. But we want to have our eyes open to any possible opportunities that might come up.

b) Women's Studies

The resolution points out the importance both of organizing on the campus and of the opportunities for both discussion and action. It says: "One of the most important areas of feminist organization for the building of a mass feminist movement is the campuses and high schools. ...The schools too provide unique opportunities for organizing both discussion and action against women's oppression. Thus campus based feminist groups are least likely to become inward, turned and oriented solely to personal liberation, counter-institutionalism, reformism, etc."

But the resolution didn't discuss a big development across the country, one which we really only became involved in this fall -- the women's studies courses. These courses on campuses across the country, some of which are large and open to the community, reflect that growing numbers of' women are beginning to question their oppression. They also reflect the big need for discussion felt by women coming to a feminist consciousness. We have intervened in big courses at University of British Columbia, University of Toronto and l'Université du Québec.

At U.B.C. and U. of .T. , these courses are large -- over 300 in attendance at most of the fall classes -- held in the evening and open to the community. Women from other campuses, high school women and some working women attend, along with women from the different tendencies in and around the feminist movement. They discuss many of the basic questions women face when they begin to question their oppression. The women's studies course at Université du Québec in Montreal is also open and held in the evenings. About 150 people attended regularly in the fall.

We have intervened in all three of these big courses, although our intervention in Toronto has been weak and erratic. In Edmonton we have also begun to intervene in the smaller women's studies courses there.

While these courses are different in different areas, we can see that many of them pose opportunities for:

1) intervening with our propaganda —- attending, setting up literature tables and participating in the classes;

2) intervening to discuss possibilities for action;

3) where possible seizing openings to participate in giving classes and leading seminars to both pose action and put forward our propaganda.

c) Abortion Campaign

In our work in the abortion campaign we can see how important the correction we made at last September's plenum was. After a shaky summer which reflected the disorientation in our work, we were able to build successful fall activities.

The October 21 actions, held one week before the federal elections, were very successful. They were held in more cities than previous coordinated actions. They were built clearly around the slogans "Repeal the Abortion Laws Now" and "Abortion: a Woman's Right to Choose." The NDP participation in these actions, particularly in the forum of NDP candidates, was better than ever before, In some areas too, the actions were significantly broader than last spring's, partly due to the challenge presented by the "right to life" which organized counter-demonstrations in some places.

Through the building actions for these actions, both Trudeau and Stanfield were pushed to make statements against repeal and Lewis was forced to change his position from "abortion is not an issue in the election" to publicly stating that the laws must be repealed.

The Vancouver comrades women's liberation work as a whole over the fall is somewhat of an example for our work across the country. Through their work they have shown how our intervention in areas such as women's studies and the NDP has not in any way cut across our work in building the abortion campaign but, in fact, has greatly aided it. The abortion campaign has given focus to our work in these areas and our work in the NDP and on the campus has broadened the campaign and increased its impact.

Our Tasks in the Coming Months

There are five main aspects to our women's liberation work that we can project for the coming months:

1) Continued intervention in the NDP, not just in Ontario and B.C. but also in other provinces, exploring what the possibilities in each area are; particularly looking for possibilities posed by the upcoming federal convention. In provinces where there are NDP governments, special possibilities are open for women's liberation work, With the new challenge fiom Joe Borowski in Manitoba, we

should seriously probe the possibilities in the NDP there.

2) Intervention in women's studies courses along the lines outlined earlier.

3) Building the cross country conference of the Canadian Women's Coalition to Repeal the Abortion Laws planned for March. We see the purpose of this conference as being to unite and broaden the abortion campaign. As a centralized action, that will have a protest side to it and as a decision making conference open to all women, we feel the conference can make big strides toward doing this.

4) Keeping in touch with and in some cases, getting in touch with, the various developments of the feminist movement, as they emerge from either organizations like the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, women's centers, Women for Political Action, etc., to struggles that break out around questions like day care, equal pay, accreditation of women's studies courses, etc. We want to look for possibilities to intervene, participate in struggles, make contacts, etc.

5) Socialist propaganda work: "We need more attention to this than it has had in the past. Circulation of our press, pamphlets, ISR*, etc, is key to this. There are big possibilities for us to intervene with our ideas and our literature in all the developments of the feminist movement and to recruit women to our movement. In addition we saw during our fall election campaigns in Toronto and Ottawa big possibilities to put forward our program for Women's Liberation and win feminists to our full socialist program. We should use the opportunities posed by campus elections in the same way.

**International Socialist Review, theoretical magazine of the SWP-US --Ed.)*

I would now like to say a word about the upcoming abortion conference before concluding.

This conference, with its building actions -- campus activities, meetings, cross-country tour, sales of *Spokeswoman*, etc, — can provide a focus for all our other activities in the feminist movement. The abortion tribunal being planned by the Vancouver chapter of the Coalition is a good example of how this can be done. lt is being planned for one of the evenings during women's week on UBC, a week of activity organised by the women's studies course there.

The possibilities for building the abortion campaign this spring are good. The Canadian Women's Coalition is already quite well established as **the** cross-Canada organization of women campaigning

against the laws. The right-wing is stepping up its campaign again. There is a need to bring more groups into the Coalition, to fill it out as a real coalition. With this in mind we want to go to all the various women's groups -- the National Action Committee, the women's centers, Women for Political Action, etc., as well as groups like the NDP, the United Church, the YWCA, ACCRA, etc., and challenge them to come in on the conference and help plan where the abortion campaign should go from here.

We are still discussing what action proposals we think should come out of the conference, but some women in the coalition have raised the idea of a Tribunal in Ottawa next fall with actions, hearings, etc., building up to it in late spring and early fall. We think this idea has a lot of merit. We want to discuss it further over the next month.

In Conclusion

The feminist radicalization is continuing to broaden and there are good possibilities for our intervention based on the line worked out, applied, and refined through experience over the past three to four years. We have to stress the importance of **flexibility** in this area -- keeping our eyes open for new opportunities.

Ongoing leadership in this area is very important. This is a lesson we have learned through both positive and negative experiences. This has to be an important task of the Central Office, the Political Committee and the Central Committee as a whole. There is a big need for coordination here so we know what is happening across the country and are able to intervene with the best knowledge of the actual situation. \

We have learned a lot through our intervention in the feminist movement. But we have much more to learn. This is a new movement. We have many big challenges yet to face in this area. This is what makes our intervention in it so full of rich experiences through which our cadre develops. In addition to this continued intervention over the spring, our convention discussion on the women's liberation resolution, which is the summary of our experiences to date, will be important for the whole movement to assimilate these experiences and equip itself to meet the growing opportunities presented to us by the deepening radicalization of women.

APPENDIX

Original Resolution

(Page 5, para 3, line 1)

Lack of control over her body is the fundamental factor that drives a woman into marriage and motherhood and ties her for life to the family.

* * * *

(Page 9, para 3)

The unfolding struggles of women has also revealed the issue which is of prime concern to women -- the right to abortion. This struggle, around the demand for repeal of the anti-abortion laws, has already mobilized thousands of women in action, through demonstrations, petitioning, meetings, etc. The large number of organizations and individuals who have spoken out for repeal but who have not yet joined the repeal struggle indicate the possibilities for mobilizing masses of women around this issue. The core of a mass feminist movement already exists around this question. This struggle for repeal of the anti-abortion laws is demonstrating that woment <u>can</u> unite around a clear demand. Although the upsurge of the new feminist movement is not even half a decade old, it has already revealed that the struggle around this issue is the central one for the development of the movement into a mass feminist movement.

Amended Resolution

Amendment #1

(Page 5, para 6, line 1)

Lack of control over her body is a fundamental factor that drives a woman into marriage and motherhood and ties her for life to the family.

Amendment #2

(This paragraph deleted)

Original Resolution

Amended Resolution

(Page 9, para 3)

(The following is new material:)

The struggle for repeal of the abortion laws has come to the fore in the last few years, and has become the first cross-country campaign of the new feminist movement. It has provided a vehicle for women to unite in ongoing struggle against a fundamental aspect of their oppression as women, in struggle for a basic democratic right. The experience of women, uniting in non-exclusionist action coalitions around this demand, is important to all the present and future struggles of the feminist movement, giving women a good example of how to fight for their demands. Through the example of this struggle women are learning many important lessons about how to struggle to win their liberation. The abortion campaign poses concretely a struggle perspective for the feminist movement. It represents the action of woment independent of and in opposition to the institutions of the bourgeoisie, around a clear demand that hits at an important aspect of their oppression.

(The following two paragraphs are from page 15 of the original, without changes, and appear on page 9 in the amended resolution)

The experience of the coalitions of organizations and individual women for repeal of the abortion laws has shown the importance of mass action coalitions around single issues to the building of a mass feminist movement. While just one of the many organizational forms which make up the feminist movement, they are the key organizational form for drawing broad numbers

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of women into struggle. A coalition unites women around a single issue. If they disagree on other feminist issues they can still become involved in the feminist struggle. It allows women to develop their feminist consciousness and a rounded analysis of their oppression through united struggle with other women for their common needs, against the interests of their oppressors. The coalitions help to cut across the misrepresentation of feminism by the media. Women who would not think of themselves as "women's libbers" a la mass media are becoming, through their participation in the coalition, militant fighters for women's liberation.

A coalition around a single issue provides a vehicle for women who want to participate in the struggle at many different levels. Through these coalitions, women who were previously inhibited from acting, or had no channel through which to act against their oppression, are becoming organizers, leaders, fighters, and clear political thinkers -- in short everything that women are not supposed to be, that women have been educated from birth to believe themselves incapable of being.

(Page 9, para 4)

It is no accident that abortion on demand has become the issue around which women today are organizing their first big international campaign. There are three main factors which have made the right for abortion the key struggle of the feminist movement -- ...

* * * *

(Page 14)

Mass Action Coalitions

(The following two paragraphs appear on page 14 of the original and page 15 of the amended resolutions.)

In March 1972, less than half a year after the first provincial coalitions were formed, the movement took a qualitative

Amended Resolution

(Subtitle added here:)

The Abortion Issue

It is no accident that abortion on demand has become the issue around which women today are organizing their first big international campaign. There are many factors which have made the struggle for the right to abortion the key struggle of the feminist movement ---...

Ammendment #3

(Page 15)
(subhead substituted:)

The Abortion Campaign

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leap forward with the formation of the Canadian Women's Coalition to Repeal the Abortion Laws. The Canadian Women's Coalition and the Quebec Front Commun pour l'aborogation des Lois sur l'Avortement represent the highest expression thus far of women organizing independently for their rights. They have organized a common campaign in English Canada and Quebec, including coordinated cross-country demonstrations on May 6, 1972 and November 20, 1971, a massive petition campaign over an extended period of time, a university referendum campaign, the production of a newspaper the Spokeswoman, a cross-country tour, and many other ambitious common projects.

These two coalitions are concrete proof that women can unite in struggle and that they can build a powerful movement when they do so. The abortion law repeal coalitions are teaching feminists how to speak and how to draw into struggle the broad masses of women.

They have shown the importance not only of choosing c s the appropriate demand to organize around, but also of learning how to popularize that demand to women. The coalitions have developed slogans to propagandize their demand for repeal of the anti-abortion laws, to explain the content of this demand. The two most widely used slogans are Abortion: a Woman's Right to Choose, and Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child. These slogans take the present conditions of women -- state-enforced motherhood -- and pose in a positive and understandable way what it is that the repeal movement wants: the democratic right of every woman to be able to decide for herself when and if she will bear a child.

(Deleted)

The slogan Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child has proven particularly effective in directing the feminist movement outwards to relate to the conditions of the majority of

Canadian women who are now or expect to be in the future, mothers, but who resent state enforced motherhood and know how it destroys their lives. It has served to cut across the media's presentation of the feminist movement as concerned only with the problems of a minority of young unmarried women -- the "liberated women." It has also played a big role in countering the attacks of the Catholic church, government and "right to life" groups that have accused women of being "murderers" for demanding the right to control their own bodies. Feminists have turned the attack back showing the supporters of abortion law repeal as the real humanists and the defenders of the murderous law as those who support killing.

(The two paragraphs beginning "The experience of the coalitions ...believe themselves incapable of being" have been transferred to page 9 with no changes.) (See above, page 20)

(Page 15, para 5)

The abortion repeal coalitions, while broader than the as-yet still small core of conscious feminists, are profoundly feminist organizations because they organize women in struggle against their oppression.

(Deleted)

(Page 15, para 6)

(The following is new material)

Polls, campus referendums, and the massive response to the petition have testified to the wide dimensions of the sentiment among women for repeal of all abortion laws. The campaign for abortion law repeal is clearly

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oriented toward the need for independent mass action by women, and has the potential of developing into a mass movement. But the organized campaign is not yet a mass movement in size. The coalitions in Quebec and English Canada still include a relatively narrow range of forces.

The difficulties in building the abortion campaign are rooted in the objective problems facing the feminist movement. Not since the suffrage movement have women attempted to launch an independent, coordinated, Canada-wide struggle for their rights -- and the real history of the suffrage movement is known only to a few women. It is a big step for a woman to move from questioning her role in society, or even from a partial understanding of her oppression, to join an organized campaign against aspects of her oppression, or to participate in a public demonstration of women.

What should a woman do to end her oppression? This is a big and difficult question for radicalizing women. Several alternatives are posed to feminists. One alternative widely propagated by the women's magazines, press, etc., is personal liberation -- the concept that it is not necessary to change society and its institutions, but rather it is enough to change your own head through discussions, reading, etc. - Other non-struggle perspectives

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are posed, such as the establishment of counter-institutions, to the sexist institutions of society, or the integration of more women into the already existing bourgeois institutions so that they can lobby for women's rights.

The abortion campaign poses another perspective -- a struggle perspective; women organizing independently to eliminate the law which oppresses them.

The struggle for the right to abortion necessitates women organizing against the government, independently of bourgeois institutions. It involves taking on the power of many of capitalism's most reactionary opinion through a more effective mobilization of women demanding their rights.

Many feminists have to be convinced of the need for a struggle perspective -- as opposed to liberal, reformist and ultraleftist strategies -- before they will join the campaign. This poses the need to educate many women on the importance of the struggle for abortion, rather than just on the importance of the issue itself.

The abortion campaign is a feminist campaign, because it organizes women independently in struggle against their oppression. At the same time the abortion coalitions don't demand that

Original R solution

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women be conscious feminists before they become involved in the campaign. They unite all those women who agree with the demand for repeal of abortion laws -- a clear demand for a basic democratic right for women.

We support the slogan, "Abortion: A Woman's Right to Choose", as the central theme of the campaign, in order to give a clear and feminist motivation to the repeal demand. This slogan explains repeal of the abortion laws in the most popular way: as a simple democratic right, and clearly the right of all women. It clarifies that the abortion issue centers around whether or not women will continue to be deprived of this right. This slogan directs its appeal at all layers of women, because it says that women themselves should be able to choose if and when to bear children. Since feminists are fighting for the right to choose over all aspects of their lives, this slogan also expresses succinctly how the abortion struggle links up with the broad struggles for liberation of women.

The slogan "Every Mother a Willing Mother; Every Child a Wanted Child" should not be put forward as one of the slogans of the abortion campaign. Unlike "Abortion: a Woman's Right to Choose", it does not pose the right of women to abortion. Experience with this slogan has shown it to lead to a diversion in our debate with the

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"right-to-lifers" rather than a clarification of the key question. It tends to lead into discussions of the situation of children, and whether abortion is a means to ensure that children will be more "wanted" and happier. We must point out how the "right-to-lifers" ignore the rights of the living; we must center our polemic on their contempt for the rights of women.

Further, it poses the question within the framework of the traditional role allotted women -- that of mothers. One of the powerful challenges of the feminist movement is to the concept that motherhood is the destiny of all women. This demands posing the question of abortion in terms of the rights of women, rather than within the framework of the mother-child relationship.

The abortion campaign has the potential of drawing in masses of women, women of very social class and social origin, since all women are denied control of their bodies. Unlike sectarians, we don't write off any group of women as being beyond the reach of this feminist campaign. But we recognize the unevenness of the radicalization of women. Some layers, in particular student women, are radicalizing faster than others. With this in mind we see the areas where the radicalization of women is the deepest as being the priority areas

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for building the abortion campaign. The two most promising areas at this time are student women, and women in the New Democratic Party.

The abortion campaign is built through its ongoing activities and its mobilizations. The abortion struggle includes many types of activities: rallies, speakouts, debates, demonstrations, petitioning, etc. All these activities complement each other. The petition is one of the tools to build the campaign and has proven particularly useful in pulling in other organizations and in giving new women a concrete activity. It is useful in drawing in activists into the campaign when used on campus abortion literature tables, etc., But it should not replace other aspects of the campaign. Its main usefulness is in building the campaign, rather than merely in showing that a large number of people support repeal. The goals of the different stages of the petition campaign should be examined in this light and should be set at a realistic level.

(The following paragraph is from the bottom of page 15 of the original draft and page 17 of amended resolution.)

As revolutionary socialists, with the task of attempting to lead the feminist movement into effective anti-capitalist struggle, we see the building of broad coalitions around specific issues, like abortion, and the mobilization of broad layers of women into action independent of and against the ruling class, as our central task. Other aspects of the feminist movement, in which we participate -- consciousness raising groups, women's centers, women's studies groups, women's groups in the

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NDP, trade unions, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, feminist groups in the high schools and campuses, etc. -- are all complementary to the central task of building the mass action coalitions.

We participate in these different formations with the aim of making direct links between them and the mass action coalitions and to educate women as to the source of their oppression and the socialist solution.

(The text continues with paragraph 2, page 16 of the original draft, "One of the most important areas of feminist organization.....")

* * * *

(Page 23)

5) Abortion repeal is important but we shouldn't devote so much time to it.

This position fails to grasp the significance of the right to abortion to women. Abortion is not just one issue among many. Without control of her body, woman is little more than a slave. This is why women have come into

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(Deleted)

(Page 17, para 5, line 11)
(text continues as follows:)

We participate in these different formations with the aim of winning women to a mass action strategy for women's liberation. We do this through the actions and program we advocate, and by making direct links between these groups and the abortion coalitions. We also participate with the aim of educating women about the source of their oppression and the socialist solution.

Amendment #4

(Page 25)

This position fails to grasp both the significance of the abortion struggle as the first cross-Canada struggle of women since the suffrage struggle, and the fact that the abortion struggle is not in competition with

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struggle first around this issue. Winning the right to abortion -- a key element in control of her body -- will thrust women forward to win new victories in her struggle for liberation. This issue is key to gaining full liberation of women and is key to the building of the feminist movement into a mass movement.

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other struggles of women. Women will struggle around many questions and revolutionaries support all actions of women for their rights. We see our priority of intervening with our limited forces as being the abortion movement, because of its strategic importance at this time: it clearly poses a mass action perspective. It is in the forefront of the feminist movement at this time.

This position actually represents a concession to all the pressure from the ruling class and its spokesmen, media, etc. to play down the abortion issue, to dump it. In face of this tremendous daily pressure, exerted <u>because</u> the struggle is so revolutionary in its implications, feminists must stand firm and not retreat. Feminists must meet the challenge to respond to this vanguard issue, and educate others as to the central importance of the abortion struggle.

(Page 25, para 3)

(The following is new material:)

Revolutionaries are challenged to educate others as to the importance of the abortion struggle. We also intervene in other struggles as they develop, and in the many discussions around the oppression of women, etc., determining the scope and character of our intervention according to the conditions in each situation.